

# My Path to STEM GIRL POWERED

## Eastwood Robotics 8787



I have never been so excited to see our hard work pay off. I was awake before sunrise on that exciting day, and I distinctly remember the bright orange and yellow colors that filled the sky, just as I remember the bright smiles from all of the girls' eager faces. Ready to go, I remember arriving at the venue in the blink of an eye. We were not quite ready yet; we still had to set up the building and prepare for all 700 attendees. Suddenly, there were a multitude of girls wrapped around the building. An occasional chant of "Girl Powered" could be heard over the music blasting through the speakers. Once inside, each booth offered a new experience for these girls. This event opened a new world of possibilities of what these girls could eventually become as adults. These young girls do not see the dream of becoming modern superheroes as impossible. They do not know of gender

discrimination in the workplace. Instead, what they see is themselves **achieving** these dreams, and this vision should be universal to all children.

VEX provides an opportunity that may seem little to adults, but to these kids, it is everything. These kids are given the chance to express themselves in a way that is much different than ever



before. Most people thought that joining STEM clubs such as robotics was only allowed for the geniuses of their schools. VEX, however, has shown that it is possible for all people to be involved through hard work and dedication. This is what Girl Powered's about.

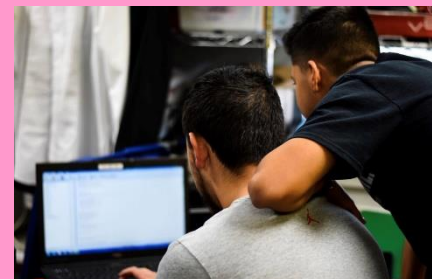
Just as these girls were eager to learn about the many opportunities STEM offers, I was eager to enter high school and explore the many interests I could **pursue**. My older brother insisted I accompany him to his robotics club meetings. As a freshman, I was intimidated by the reputation of the club and instead of searching to find my niche, I kept to myself in the corner of the room and waited to go home. It wasn't until I was asked to help set up for a Girl Powered convention that they were hosting that I began to take interest in the club. This was the first night I was indifferent to how much time I spent there and instead involved myself in any way I could to help. Without realizing it, I began to network with the club members I had shied away from and began taking interest in the different subjects robotics offered. Although I was a volunteer for the event, presenting to the hundreds of young girls and answering their insightful questions was my way of attending the Girl Powered event as if I were an elementary student at the peak of discovering what truly

interested me. I always looked up to my brother because of how smart and well-rounded he was, and as I grew up I thought that his interests in STEM could only be pursued if I were exactly like him, and I knew I wasn't. I always hid behind a mask, never allowing myself to like what everyone was quick to shut down. But after the Girl Powered event, I realized I didn't need to be anyone else. It was more than realizing girls could do **anything**, but that we are all the same and nothing without the other.



Throughout my years in robotics, I've learned that despite a difference in personalities and work ethics, a team is meant to **help** each other, not tear each other down. Although we all vary in our strong points, my peers make it a point to learn the basics of each job, even if it isn't something they enjoy or want to learn. Rather than depending on one sole person to take care of a vital component for the robot, we are able to help each other and offer new **perspectives** towards a solution that one person may not have been able to come to on their own. During my first year in robotics, as competition season was approaching, I decided to learn how to program. Without realizing it, I found an unexpected passion I became obsessed with. Once we started competing, it was vital that we had a working autonomous in order to win matches, but as determined as I was, sometimes I needed help. My team members could tell I was frustrated and exhausted, so they offered to overlook my program and work together to try a few new approaches. I was shocked by how differently we all had attempted to remedy the situation.

Likewise, my team members and I were able to contribute different strategies and designs for the robots, some that took our team to World's but that were generated by team members who didn't



focus on that certain subject. By challenging ourselves to learn beyond our comfort zones for the sake of helping our team members succeed, we learned that robotics wasn't just a club to pursue our interests, but also a place to **learn** from our peers and



appreciate the value of teamwork. By learning to work together, we've become a family that is able to depend upon and better communicate with each other. Because we are more than a team, we attract a diverse group of both boys and girls looking for a place

to not only fit in, but also develop their talents. Even newcomers who may be intimidated to join the club quickly learn there is room for everyone, and that this is a place where their opinions are appreciated and hard work is **valued**.

The different perspectives brought by each member have built a stronger team—a team that has learned to strive to the absolute top, willing to do whatever it takes to get there. By working and supporting each other, the Eastwood Robotics team have been West Texas state champions for four consecutive years, where we then went on to compete at the World's Championship. Over the last two years, we have won the Game Design Challenge and the Design Award through each member's intense determination. In addition to the physical awards we earned, our club has done more than strive to be the best. For the past three years, we've come together to host the world's largest Girl Powered event. Each year we continue to grow, and having more girls attending requires a lot of planning, funding, and patience. Our most recent event, held on October 12, 2018, had over 700 attendees. As a team, we worked together to accumulate the funds needed to run this event and successfully funded 90% of it, including the price of food and shirts. We even went beyond our school walls by partnering with other high



schools and the University of Texas at El Paso to offer different outlooks to expand the Girl Powered message. While winning an award is an amazing experience, spreading the Girl Powered message to a growing audience each year is more valuable than any trophy. We're not just teaching future generations the importance of working together but teaching ourselves to be selfless, dependable, and, most importantly, bold risk-takers.

Although joining robotics has taught me how to face adversity and the importance of working together, what I've been most inspired by in the name of Girl Powered is not a situation, but rather one of my own team members. Each year we've hosted Girl Powered, we've learned how excited and eager the girls are to meet Wonder Woman—better known to us as Frances Rangel.

For them, she is a superhero capable of anything that most girls hope to one day become. Like these girls, I admire Wonder Woman's resilience and perseverance, but I've also come to know *our* Wonder



Woman's story and learned she was just an ordinary girl who fought for what she wanted, did not take no for an answer, and was always willing to help or work with her peers in difficult times. She is a woman who uses knowledge as her power and her setbacks as a shield from future mistakes. She isn't concerned about being the best in the club but is instead focused on working with her team members to make Eastwood Robotics the best it can be as a whole.

Girl powered is meant to empower the future generation of engineers, mathematicians, and scientists. It's not about who's better than whom; it's about learning to work together, seeing ourselves as one rather than many, and uniting to find a solution. In the Eastwood Robotics team, no matter our size, we are

always one heart working towards the same goals and striving towards success. Although that may mean different things to us, we know it is only attainable through teamwork. We are not made up of males and females; rather, we see each other as our passions and how hard we're willing to work.



## Credits

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The Pathway to STEM Girl Powered

